

# Ticuna language

**Ticuna**, or **Tikuna**, is a language spoken by approximately 50,000 people in Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. It is the native language of the Ticuna people. Ticuna is generally classified as a language isolate, but may be related to the extinct Yuri language (see Ticuna-Yuri) and there has been some research indicating similarities between Ticuna and Carabaya.<sup>[3][4]</sup> It is a tonal language, and therefore the meaning of words with the same phonemes can vary greatly simply by changing the tone used to pronounce them.

Ticuna is also known as Magta, Maguta, Tucuna/Tukuna, and Tukna.

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## Sociolinguistic situation

### Brazil

Despite being home to more than 50% of the Ticunas, Brazil has only recently started to invest in native language education. Brazilian Ticunas now have a written literature and an education provided by the Brazilian National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI) and the Ministry of Education. Textbooks in Ticuna are used by native teachers trained in both Portuguese and Ticuna to teach the language to the children. A large-scale project has been recording traditional narrations and writing them down to provide the literate Ticunas with some literature to practice with.

Ticuna	
<i>Duüxügu</i>	
<b>Native to</b>	Brazil, Colombia, Peru
<b>Region</b>	West Amazonas. Also spoken in Colombia, Peru.
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Ticuna people
<b>Native speakers</b>	47,000 (1998–2008) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	Ticuna–Yuri <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Ticuna</b></li></ul>
Language codes	
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	tca
<b>Glottolog</b>	ticu1245 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ticu1245">http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ticu1245</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>



Distribution of speakers of the Ticuna language

Coordinates: 3°15'S 68°35'W

Ticuna education is not a privilege, but part of a wider project carried on by the Brazilian government to provide all significant minorities with education in their own language.

In 2012, the Brazilian government launched an educational campaign for the prevention of AIDS and violence against women, the first such campaign in Brazil ever conducted in an indigenous language.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Peru

Ticunas in Peru have had native language education at least since the 1960s. They use a writing system that was, apparently, the base for the development of the Brazilian one. However, much of the literature available to Peruvian Ticunas comprise standard textbooks.

## Colombia

Colombian Ticunas are taught in Spanish, when they have access to school at all. Since the establishment of Ticuna schools in Brazil some have ventured to attend them.

## Christian Ministries

A number of Christian ministries have reached the Ticuna people. These ministries have translated the bible into the native Ticuna language and even have a weekday radio show that is broadcast in Ticuna, Portuguese, and Spanish by the Latin American Ministries (LAM).<sup>[6]</sup>

## Literacy

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Besides its use at the Ticuna schools, the language has a dozen books published every year, both in Brazil and Peru. Those books employ a specially devised phonetic writing system using conventions similar to those found in Portuguese (except for K instead of C and the letter Ñ instead of NH) instead of the more complex scientific notation found, for instance, at the Language Museum.

In school Ticuna is taught formally. Children in schools typically in areas of Catholic Missionaries are also taught either Portuguese or Spanish as well.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Linguistic structure

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Ticuna is a fairly isolating language morphologically, meaning that most words consist of just one morpheme. However, Ticuna words usually have more than one syllable, unlike isolating languages such as Vietnamese. Ticuna is an unusually tonal language for South America, with five level tones and four contour tones. Tones are only indicated orthographically, with diacritics, when confusion is likely. The six vowels may be nasal or laryngealized; consonants may also be glottalized. Glottal stop is spelled x, and the sixth vowel ü. Typologically, Ticuna word order is subject–verb–object (SVO), though unusually this can vary within the language.

Research has indicated isolated tonal languages with complex tones are more likely to occur in regions of higher humidity and higher mean average temperature because it is believed the vocal folds can produce less consistent tones in colder, drier air. Ticuna was one of the languages of focus in this study due to its prevalence—and complexity—of tones.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Classification

Some have tentatively associated the Ticuna language within the proposals of the macro-arawakano or with macro-tukano stocks, although these classifications are highly speculative given the lack of evidence. A more recent hypothesis has linked Yuri-Ticuna with the Saliban and Hoti languages in the Duho stock.<sup>[9]</sup> However, the linguistic consensus is that Ticuna may actually be a language isolate in its present-day situation, since Yuri is extinct.

## Phonology

Vowels qualities are /a e i ɛ̃ u o/. Vowels may be nasalized and/or show creaky voice, under which tones are lowered.<sup>[10]</sup> There are diphthongs /aɪ̃/ and /aʊ̃/ that carry a single tone, contrasting with vowel sequences /ai/ and /au/ that carry two tones.

Oral and nasalized vowels and creaky voiced

	Front	Central	Back
Close	/i/, /ĩ/, /ĩ/, /ĩ̃/	/ɨ/, /ɨ̃/, /ɥ/, /ɥ̃/	/u/, /ũ/, /ũ/, /ũ̃/
Mid	/e/, /ẽ/, /ẽ/, /ẽ̃/		/o/, /õ/, /õ/, /õ̃/
Open		/a/, /ã/, /ã/, /ã̃/	

Long vowels do not occur, but sequences of identical vowels (such as *aa*) that carry two tones. Tones are /ʔ ʔ̃ ʔ̄ ʔ̅ ʔ̆ ʔ̇ ʔ̈ ʔ̉/. Tones in spoken Ticuna are not related to an absolute pitch, but rather by the relative difference in pitch.<sup>[7]</sup>

The consonants of Ticuna consist of the following phonemes:<sup>[10]</sup>

	<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Stop</u>	p, b	t, d		k, g	ʔ
<u>Affricate</u>			tʃ, dʒ		
<u>Fricative</u>	(f)	s		(x)	
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
<u>Liquid</u>			l, r		
<u>Glide</u>	w		j		

Ticuna has no lateral or uvular consonants.<sup>[10]</sup>

The affricate /dʒ/ (spelled "y") may be pronounced as /j̃/,<sup>[11]</sup> and also /j/, but only before the vowel /a/. A /w/ vowel sound may also be pronounced as a central /ɨ̃/ sound. /f s x l/ are found in Spanish loans.

## Common words<sup>[12]</sup>

<b>Ticuna Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Wüxi	One
Taxre	Two
Tomaxipü	Three
Āgümücü	Four
Wüxi mixepüx	Five
Naixmixwa rü wüxi	Six
Naixmixwa rü taxre	Seven
Naixmixwa rü tomaxipü	Eight
Naixmixwa rü āgümücü	Nine
Guxmixepüx	Ten
Chatü	Man
Ngexüi	Woman
Airu	Dog
Iake	Sun
Tawēmake	Moon
Dexá	Water

The counting words in Ticuna imply a base five system of counting as the word for five is the combination of "one five". Six through nine all contain the same beginning "naixmixwa rü" and then append the values for one through four respectively (such that six is "naixmixwa rü" and "wüxi" meaning one).<sup>[12]</sup>

## Examples of spoken language

An example of spoken Ticuna can be found [here](http://files.globalrecordings.net/audio/language/mp3/sample-1675.mp3) (<http://files.globalrecordings.net/audio/language/mp3/sample-1675.mp3>).<sup>[13]</sup>

<b>Phrase<sup>[14]</sup></b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Nuxmaxē pa corix	general greeting spoken to a man ("sir")
Nuxmaxē pa chiurax	general greeting spoken to a woman ("madam")
Nuxmaxē pa yimax	general greeting spoken to a man ("fellow")
Nuxmaxē pa woxrecü	general greeting spoken to a woman ("girl")
Nuxmaxē pa pacüx	general greeting spoken to a young woman ("miss")
Nuxmaxē pa chomücüx	general greeting spoken to a friend
Nuxmax	general greeting spoken to a stranger
Ngexta cuxū?	Where are you going? (spoken to one person)
Ngexta pexī?	Where are you going? (spoken to a group)
Ngexta ne cuxū?	Where are you coming from? (spoken to one person)
Ngexta ne pexī?	Where are you coming from? (spoken to a group)

## Vocabulary (Loukotka 1968)

Loukotka (1968) lists the following basic vocabulary items.<sup>[15]</sup>

gloss	Tucuna
one	wöi
two	tádi
three	tamaípo
head	na-eró
ear	na-chin
tooth	ná-puita
man	yáte
fire	öö
sun	öake
earth	náni
maize	cháwue
tapir	náke

## References

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## External links

- "Conversational Tikuna" (<https://www.sil.org/resources/archives/30245>) – Ticuna course and grammar at the Summer Institute of Linguistics
  - Ticuna publications for download (<https://www.sil.org/resources/search/language/tca/online/1>)
  - OLAC resources in and about the Ticuna language (<http://www.language-archives.org/language/tca>)
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